

[By Niraj Chokshi](#)

The White House last week ruled out invoking the constitution to unilaterally raise the nation's borrowing limit, but if the president changes his mind one lawmaker wants to know he has support.

Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., is collecting signatures for a letter to the president letting him know that he has backing in Congress if he chooses to invoke the 14th amendment to raise the debt ceiling in the event that Congress fails to do so.

"We would support your use of any authority available to you, including the 14th amendment, to preserve America's full faith and credit and prevent further damage to our economy," Welch, the House Democratic Caucus chief deputy whip said in the letter. During the last debt-ceiling standoff in the summer of 2011, Welch collected 114 signatures for a letter calling for a clean vote on extending the debt ceiling.

Some argue that the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, part of which states that the "validity of the public debt... shall not be questioned," gives the president authority to increase the nation's borrowing limit in order to prevent a default on the debt. But White House Press Secretary Jay Carney last week said the administration had ruled it out as an option.

"This administration does not believe that the 14th Amendment gives the president the power to ignore the debt ceiling—period," he said on Thursday.

The nation will hit its debt limit by the end of the month, though the Treasury Department will be able to employ tools to delay a default on the nation's debt until mid-February or early March, according to a recent estimate from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. Such an event could prove devastating to the economy, derailing the recovery and damaging the nation's virtually stellar international credit standing, economists warn.

The debt limit, however, is the largest piece of leverage Republicans have in the negotiations to avert the \$500 billion in year-end tax increases and spending cuts known as the fiscal cliff. And while the GOP has taken a stand on raising the ceiling in the past, they are not politically well-positioned to do so again.

The letter follows:

Dear Mr. President,

As you know, Speaker Boehner has explicitly stated that he will withhold support for raising the debt ceiling as leverage to win concessions in fiscal negotiations with the White House. This is the same tactic he used in August 2011 at great expense to the American economy. The result was an additional \$18.9 billion in interest over 10 years and America's first ever credit downgrade.

We fully support your view that Congress should not "play this game." Threatening default on our nation's debt is an economic weapon of mass destruction that will have immediate and catastrophic consequences for the economy as well as America's standing in the world.

In the event the Speaker follows through on his reckless threat, we would support your use of any authority available to you, including the 14th amendment, to preserve America's full faith and credit and prevent further damage to our economy.

Sincerely,

PETER WELCH